



Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A BULLETIN FOR
PROFESSIONALS

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Systems of Care

Many children in the child welfare system and those at risk of abuse and neglect have a variety of physical, mental, social, emotional, educational, and developmental needs. Child welfare professionals have worked for years with their counterparts in other agencies to piece together the services available for these children and their families.

Systems of Care is the name of an approach that builds partnerships to create a broad, integrated process for meeting these multiple needs. This approach is based on the principles of interagency collaboration; individualized, strengths-based care practices; cultural competence; community-based services; and

What's Inside:

- Systems of care that relate to child welfare
- Application of systems of care
- Guiding principles of systems of care
- Examples of systems of care
- Organizations involved with systems of care



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full participation of families at all levels of the system. A centralized focus of Systems of Care is building the infrastructure needed to result in positive outcomes for children and families.

This bulletin is adapted from information on Systems of Care found on the website of Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service_array/soc). This bulletin includes information on:

- Systems of Care approach
- Application of Systems of Care to child welfare
- Guiding principles of Systems of Care
- Community examples of Systems of Care
- Organizations involved with Systems of Care

In addition to the information found here, the Information Gateway website includes a Systems of Care Toolkit (www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service_array/soc/build/soctoolkit.cfm) that addresses policies, infrastructure, services, and supports. The website also includes information on building Systems of Care and communicating with other professionals.

Systems of Care That Relate to Child Welfare

Systems of Care has been used as a catalyst for changing the way child and family service agencies organize, fund, purchase, and provide services for children and families with multiple needs. This approach has been applied across the United States in various ways at the macro level (through public policy

and system change) and at the micro level (in the way service providers directly interact with children and families in need of assistance). Systems of Care is demonstrated through multi-agency sharing of resources and responsibilities and full participation of professionals and families as active partners in planning, funding, implementing, and evaluating services and system outcomes.

Systems of Care enables cross-agency coordination of services for child welfare involved children and families, regardless of where or how they enter the system. Agencies work strategically, in partnership with families and other formal and informal supports, to address children's unique needs. To do so effectively, Systems of Care communities:

- Agree on common goals, values, and principles to guide their work
- Develop a shared infrastructure to coordinate efforts toward the common goals of safety, permanency, and well-being
- Within that infrastructure, work to ensure the availability of a high-quality array of evidenced-based and promising practices and supports designed to support families and protect children from maltreatment, while promoting their well-being and stability in a permanent home

It is important to note that Systems of Care is not a "program" or "model." Instead, it serves as a framework for guiding processes and activities designed to meet the needs of children and families. States and communities must have the flexibility to implement this approach in a way that evolves over time as needs and conditions change.

ILLUSTRATION OF A SYSTEMS OF CARE APPROACH

Monte is a 13-year-old in the child welfare system. His mother has a history of substance abuse and child neglect. Due to a recent shoplifting charge, Monte has recently become involved with the juvenile justice system as well.

Thanks to the Systems of Care approach in his community, local agencies and organizations partner with the family in a coordinated way to keep Monte in his home and help his family access services that address their strengths and needs:

- By arranging to meet Monte and his mother in their home at a time that does not conflict with the family's schedule, agency representatives are able to work in partnership with the family to ensure the goals of their individualized service plan can be met.
- By working with the school system, the Care Coordinator is able to arrange alternative busing for Monte during his stay in a temporary shelter, allowing him to continue at his current school.
- By working as a liaison with the juvenile justice and dependency court judges, a Family Advocate ensures Monte's family is able to adhere to multiple agency requirements and expectations.
- With support of flexible funding, Monte is able to attend music lessons, which he identified as an interest, while his mother participates in mandatory substance abuse counseling, reducing the need for child care.

Application of Systems of Care

Systems of Care was originally developed to address the needs of children with serious emotional disturbances. It is now being applied to other populations whose needs require services from multiple agencies, including families in the child welfare system. This broader implementation will help more families benefit from the Systems of Care focus on improving access to and availability of services, reducing service and funding

fragmentation, and improving the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of frontline service providers.

The Children's Bureau conducts the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process as a means to assess State child welfare agencies' performance on seven outcomes and seven systemic factors. Results from these reviews have documented the need for a more comprehensive strategy to support children and families in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. Systems of Care shows promise as a means to improve performance in these areas, for example, by helping to

prevent out-of-home placements, reduce the number of placements, and address the primary health, mental health, and educational needs of children and their families.

Systems of Care is now being used to address needs identified by States' CFSRs and improve outcomes for children and families involved with child welfare, including:

- Children and families at risk of child maltreatment
- Children who have been substantiated for maltreatment but have not been removed from the home
- Children in State custody (foster care)

Guiding Principles of Systems of Care

In Systems of Care, State, county, and local agencies partner with families and communities to address the multiple needs of children and families involved in child welfare and other service systems. For this partnership to be successful, a shared set of guiding principles is at the heart of the effort. Systems of Care is based on the guiding principles of interagency collaboration, individualized strengths-based care, cultural competence, child and family involvement, community-based services, and accountability. These principles are essential elements of any successful child and family service delivery system, including child welfare. The implementation of these principles reflects the common goals of the agency, community, and family to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families.

Interagency collaboration engages child- and family-serving agencies from the public, private, and faith-based sectors. Examples include child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, education, substance abuse, health, and (if separate) the agency responsible for serving Native American families. These agencies work together to address the complex needs of children and families in a spirit of community partnership. In Systems of Care, interagency collaboration is reflected at both the governance and direct practice level. Formal interagency governance teams can:

- Provide financial support to fill service gaps
- Develop interagency training agendas
- Develop funding strategies
- Make joint agency budget recommendations
- Create interagency management information systems
- Provide gatekeeping functions to reduce/end out-of-community placements
- Develop communication plans and program development strategies

Why is interagency collaboration important?

- Interagency collaboration creates a sense of community ownership for supporting children and families and addressing their needs and strengths.
- Children and families come to the child welfare system with multiple needs requiring the assistance of multiple agencies. Often, when multiple services are

required, the effectiveness of any one service is related to the availability and effectiveness of other services needed by the family.

- Interagency collaboration reduces duplication of services and allows for greater efficiency in use of public resources.
- Collaboration creates a fuller understanding among community partners of the policies and statutes that drive funding and practice issues, while maximizing funding and programmatic resources available to children and families.
- Interagency collaboration allows for the creation of data systems that can track children and families across agencies and provides for a unified voice to legislators on the unmet needs of children.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and interagency collaboration:

- Are all child-serving agencies involved in the System of Care?
- Are there interagency agreements, memorandums of understanding, or statutes that forge the interagency collaboration?
- Are families a part of all interagency collaboration efforts?
- Are processes in place that allow for the State/county/city/tribal interagency teams to have a governance role within the System of Care?
- Is each interagency partner contributing funds to the system?

- Are all general fund dollars being maximized by matching them up with Federal funds (e.g., Medicaid)?

Individualized strengths-based care acknowledges each child and family's unique set of strengths and challenges. Formal and informal supports are used to "wrap" services and supports around each child and family (rather than families "fitting in" to preexisting service structures). Issues of culture, gender, age, religious background, and class are addressed in the individualized plan of care. The plan changes frequently, based on ongoing individualized assessments of strengths and needs.

Plans are created by teams comprised of people who know the child and family, including neighbors, friends, family, and professionals in fields including child welfare, mental health, education, substance abuse, and juvenile justice. The major task of the team is to create an individualized plan of care that is community- and strengths-based, made up of formal and informal services and supports.

Why is individual strengths-based care important?

- Each child and family has unique attributes that must be addressed if positive outcomes are to be achieved.
- Individualized care fully engages the family in designing and implementing a plan of care.
- Children and families receive services that match their unique strengths and needs to services and supports.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and individualized strengths-based care:

- Does the individualized care team always involve the family when designing a plan of care?
- Do plans of care take into consideration the child and family's cultural and religious/spiritual background?
- Do plans of care maximize the natural supports within the family's community?
- Are funding streams being maximized within the interagency makeup of the System of Care?
- Does the System of Care include a flexible fund to create nontraditional services that are essential to the plan of care for individual children and families?

Cultural competence refers to the way in which services, policies, and agencies reflect the view that the individual's culture, race, and ethnicity are assets to be built upon. Systems of Care have been built on the notion that in order to work effectively with a child and family, there must be an understanding of the family's culture, race, values, and ethnic heritage. By developing a culturally competent system, the likelihood is enhanced that services will have a positive effect on the outcomes for each child and family.

Why is cultural competence important?

- A person's culture can affect the kinds of services needed, as well as the optimal place, time, and method of delivering services and supports.
- Addressing issues of culture, race, class, and ethnic background increases the likelihood of a positive intervention.

- Through working to understand the unique cultural needs of the families within Systems of Care, the importance of respect, dignity, nondiscrimination, and self-determination are conveyed to all participants.
- The issues of child abuse and neglect are not unique to any one culture or community. Being willing and able to understand the needs of the unique families seeking or needing services will improve both the families' willingness to participate and the system's capacity to provide effective services.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and cultural competence:

- Is leadership committed to the cultural competence effort?
- Are policies in place to support cultural competence within the system?
- Are the recommended services responsive to each child and family's culture?
- Is the family's culture taken into account in determining when, how, and where services will be offered?
- Are staff reflective of the community's racial and ethnic diversity?
- Is staff training regularly offered on the theory and practice of cultural competence?
- Are families involved in developing the system's cultural competence efforts?
- Do child welfare staff interact with children and families in culturally and linguistically competent ways?

- Are staff culturally sensitive to the place and type of services made available to the child and family?
- Does the System of Care reach out to the diverse races and cultures in the community?

Child and family involvement within a System of Care requires mutual respect and partnerships between families and professionals. Families are involved as key stakeholders, whether they are helping tailor the individualized plan of care for their child or helping design, build, or maintain Systems of Care. Families are involved in policy development, care coordination, evaluation, strategic planning, service provision, social marketing, and individual and system advocacy. Families include caretakers, kin, and extended family members.

Why is child and family involvement important?

- The goal of permanency for children either by reunification with their biological parents or other permanency options is best facilitated when the family is involved in planning and participating in services.
- Engaging family members in the planning and provision of services respects their capabilities and emphasizes their role as part of the solution to their problems.
- Involving families helps ensure sensitivity to their cultural, service, and support needs.
- Child and Family Services Reviews have found that a significantly higher percentage of children have better permanency

and stability in their living situations in those States that rated strongly in developing case plans jointly with parents.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and child and family involvement:

- Are families invited to all meetings that address Systems of Care issues?
- Are families adequately represented on all Systems of Care committees?
- Do the families involved in designing and building Systems of Care reflect the cultural makeup of the community?
- Are staff trained in how to engage and involve families?
- Are family members employed in the System of Care?
- Are families reimbursed for time spent supporting Systems of Care (e.g., wages, transportation, childcare expenses)?

Community-based services are the optimal method for providing care and support to children and families within Systems of Care. Whenever possible, children receive services in their own homes and neighborhoods. Providing community-based care requires the availability of a range of service options that include evidenced-based and promising practices and informal supports. Informal supports are identified, based on the strengths and needs of each family. In many cases, funding for informal supports comes from a flexible pool of money contributed from the agencies that are part of the Systems of Care community.

Why are community-based services important?

- Keeping children in their homes, neighborhood schools, and local communities has a positive impact on the well-being of the child and family. Moving, in many cases, may generate unnecessary stress for an already traumatized child.
- By remaining in the community, the child is able to retain critical bonds with friends, family, and school.
- When services are community-based, the work done with the child and family is in the context of where the child lives.
- The community (faith-based organizations, nonprofit agencies, neighbors, and mentors) can offer additional positive/informal supports to the child and family.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and community-based services:

- Is a broad array of evidenced-based and promising practices, informal services, and supports available to meet the needs of children and families in the community?
- Are services available to families in their primary language and at times and locations convenient to families?
- Is in-home support offered to families?
- Are flexible funds available to meet the unique needs of each child and family?
- Are child-serving agencies invited to the table and working together on behalf of children and families?
- Are caseworkers and staff from collaborating agencies trained in maximiz-

ing informal supports for children and families?

- Do child welfare caseworkers and other staff interact with children and families in culturally and linguistically competent ways?
- Are caseworkers and other staff culturally sensitive to the place and type of services made available to the child and family?
- Is the family routinely seen as one of the child's major resources?

Accountability refers to the Systems of Care principal that practice, organizational, and financial outcomes must be continuously assessed to determine the ongoing effectiveness of Systems of Care in meeting the needs of children and families. An essential component of an effective accountability system is the development of a management information system that tracks important indicators of service, fiscal and system performance.

Why is accountability important?

- By focusing on the impacts and outcomes of the services provided, such as child safety while in care, communities have a benchmark against which they can set realistic goals and measure continuous improvement.
- To ensure continuous improvement of Systems of Care, it is critical to incorporate outcome data into ongoing decision-making at all levels.
- In times of limited resources, decision makers are most likely to allocate resources to initiatives that demonstrate

effectiveness and an efficient use of funds.

- The safety and well-being of children and families is a shared responsibility of the entire community. As such, Systems of Care communities join together in holding one another accountable for ensuring positive outcomes, regardless of where the child and/or family seek help.

Questions to ask about Systems of Care and accountability:

- Do caseworkers use data to monitor their progress and inform decision-making?
- Is the management information system designed to capture relevant performance information from relevant inter-agency partners?
- Have families been involved in the design and implementation of the data system?
- Does the management information system track costs, quality of services, and outcomes for children and families?
- How does the management information system line up with the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review data?
- Does the System of Care have a structured process for ongoing performance improvement, including dissemination of key findings to stakeholders, regular review of performance data, and use of outcomes data in decision-making?
- Is an ongoing interagency data improvement committee a part of the Systems of Care infrastructure?

- Are data from the management information system used to improve services and supports?
- Are data generated from the management information system used to inform the public, legislators, and key policy administrators about the System of Care status?

Examples of Systems of Care

Vermont

Vermont's System of Care serves the entire State, or a population of about 613,000 (147,000 of whom are children under the age of 18). The System of Care is enabled by ACT 264, Vermont legislation that required interagency cooperation and served as one of the catalysts to encourage further collaborative efforts at both the State and local levels. Because of this legislation, three State departments are required to work with families to build an interagency System of Care and to write and implement to the best of their ability Coordinated Service Plans for individual eligible youth. These requirements have provided incentives for the State to blend funds across departmental lines to maximize State and Federal funding and better support community-based services. <http://www.state.vt.us/dmh/about/cafu/aboutcafu.html>

Sacred Child Project (North Dakota and South Dakota)

The Sacred Child Project's service delivery area includes the Spirit Lake Nation; the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; the Three Affiliated Tribes of Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara; the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa; and the Trenton

Indian Service Area in North Dakota and South Dakota. The project uses the wraparound process to work with Native American youth ages 1 to 22. The wraparound process incorporates culturally appropriate interventions and the natural support system of the community to provide intensive case management for enrolled children and their families. A notable feature of this System of Care is the inclusion of traditional healing practices.

<http://www.nativeinstitute.org/mmi.htm>

The Dawn Project (Indianapolis, Indiana)

(This project was recognized by the Children's Bureau CFSR team as a promising approach; see <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/promise/index.htm>.)

In late 1995, State and local officials in Indiana formed a consortium to improve support to Marion County children and youth. The Dawn project receives integrated revenue from the child welfare, education, juvenile justice, and mental health systems. The local child welfare system makes referrals to the Dawn Project to work with children in foster care with special needs whom the agency is trying to reunify with their parents. The Dawn Project is run by a local care management organization that operates according to the values of Systems of Care. The project contracts for staff with the community mental health centers in Marion County; the service coordinators are employees of the centers but are housed in the project offices. Project staff serve only 8 to 10 families at any time and help to coordinate the services provided with the other personnel working with that family, for example, the child welfare case manager. A supervisor oversees teams of five service coordinators; several case managers support the teams by providing specific services to children and families, such as supervising parent visitation. Dawn Project

staff utilize a computerized record-keeping system, *The Clinical Manager*, which tracks fiscal and service utilization and provides up-to-date information on the plan of care and current services and supports being provided to the child and family. The project provides technical assistance to other States and communities in creating Systems of Care and has served as a model program for other replication efforts in Ohio, Texas, and New Jersey. <http://www.choicesteam.org/page.aspx?page=home>

Organizations Involved With Systems of Care

National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Child Welfare Systems of Care Grantees

This Center provides programmatic and evaluation technical assistance, research, and training to child welfare agencies involved in building Systems of Care. The Center conducts the national evaluation and provides technical assistance to recipients of cooperative agreements through the Children's Bureau's *Improving Child Welfare Outcomes Through Systems of Care initiative*.

For more information, contact SystemsofCare@icfcaliber.com or call 703.219.4317. www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/service_array/soc

The Technical Assistance Center for Systems of Care and Evidence Based Practices for Children and Families

This Center provides support to 30 grant sites across the State of Indiana that received funding to build systems of care for youth

with multiple needs. The Center provides on-site consultation, assessment of community strengths and needs, customized community and regional training workshops, and coordination with State agencies to develop standards and outcome measures for Systems of Care.
<https://www.choicesteam.org/page.aspx?page=home>

Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development National Technical Assistance Center and National Center for Cultural Competence

Since 1984, the technical assistance center at Georgetown University has been dedicated to working in partnership with families and many other national, State, and local leaders across the United States to reform services for children and adolescents with multiple needs and their families. The National Center for Cultural Competence provides training, technical assistance, and support to national, State, and local communities invested in planning for and implementing cultural and linguistic competence in Systems of Care.

http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/programs/ta_center/index.html

<http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc/>

Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health

The Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health at the University of South Florida's Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute addresses the need for improved services and outcomes for children with serious emotional/behavioral disabilities and their families.

<http://rtckids.fmhi.usf.edu/>

Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health

The Center is dedicated to researching, evaluating, and promoting effective community-based, culturally competent, family-centered services for children and youth with multiple needs and their families.

<http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/>

Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health

Since its authorization in 1993, the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program has provided funding to over 67 Systems of Care communities around the country. The goal of this partnership is to support the grant communities in their efforts to successfully develop and implement local Systems of Care targeting children and youth with serious emotional disturbance and their families.

<http://www.tapartnership.org/>

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health

This advocacy organization serves families of children and youth with mental health needs. The Federation represents children, youth, and families from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

<http://www.ffcmh.org/>